ASIFA EAST
The International Animated Film Society

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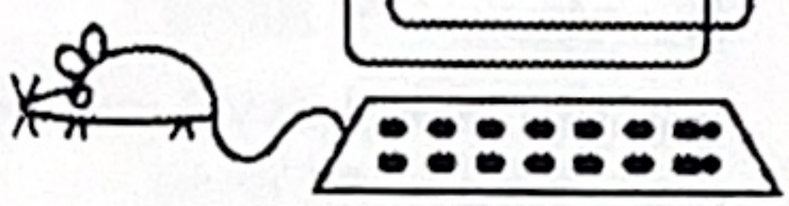
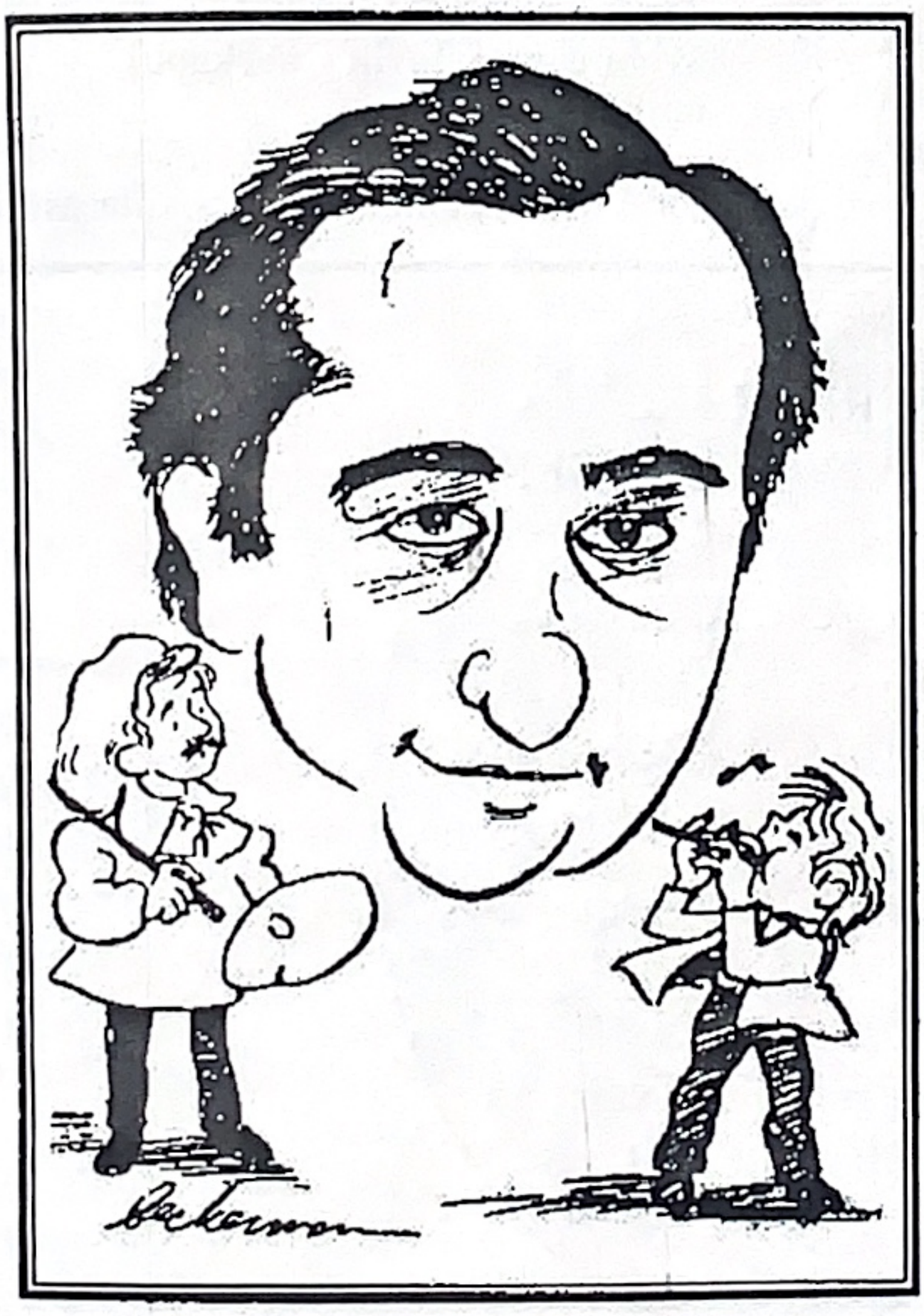
October 2002 Issue



ASIFA EAST October Event:

* A Tribute to John Gati

Monday October 28th,
7 PM
SVA
209 E 23rd St. (btwn 2nd & 3rd Ave)
Amphitheatre



Also in this issue...

* **Michael Sporn** on John Gati

* Greetings From The South by **Linda Simensky**

* articles and reviews by **Richard Gorey, Jr.**

* **Biljana Labovic** on Zagreb 2002!

* And much, much more!!!

ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society Northeast /New York Chapter

A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

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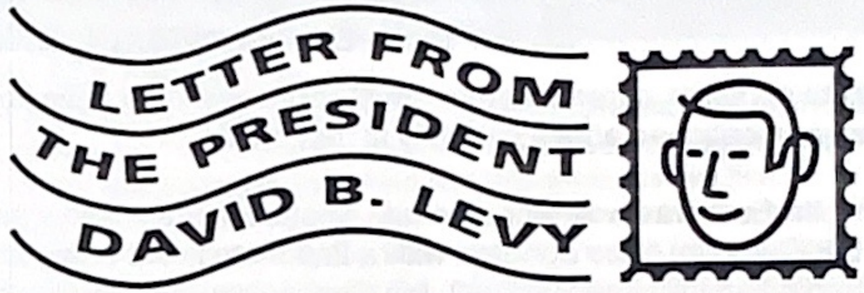
FREE LIFE DRAWING CLASSES

For ASIFA-East
members and students at
SVA 141 W. 21st St. Room 603 C
From 7:00-9:30 PM on Thursday
nights from Now - April 26

Any questions?
Contact Toni Tysen
(212) 586-8662



A new Asifa season is here! Where did the summer go? Did everybody buy those bold new Rugby shirts they are peddling at Old Navy? How about those pointy shoes all the women are wearing? Well, how about that? Hopefully we'll have a few dog-days of summer left. Speaking of dog days...I just adopted two kittens. I have a friend who just got two puppies. We're going to cross breed them and make "kuppies".

I just got back from the Ottawa International Animation Festival. The festival, for the most part, was excellent. However, those who attended Annecy or Zagreb probably saw a lot of the films already. I can only compare Ottawa to the one I attended in 2000, in which the films selected seemed to be a touch more entertaining and narrative based. Others noticed the lack of humorous films too. One well known festival goer quipped that they would starting their own festival called, Nottawa, in which there would only be funny films screened. Every other film this year seemed to be a long non-narrative film with little to no innovation or interest. If you see a Jackson Pollock painting in a gallery- you decide how long you are going to stand in front of it. In film, the director has got you in your seat until the film is over.

The real crowd pleasers of the festival were found in the Children's films competition. Here was a variety of narrative, art and animation styles that added up to make a complete experience. I recommend you check out such films as "Le Trop Petit Prince" (Zoia Trofimova), "Trim Time" (Gil Alkabetz), and "Tornehekken- The Edge Of Thorns" (Anita Killi).

There were some great retrospectives to see this year! Highlights for me were Buzzco, Ink Tank, and John Kricfalusi. These programs filled the strong narrative and humor void created by the competitions. Perhaps even of more interest were the panel discussions. At one panel, on Writing For Animation, David Fine, Mo Willems and John Kricfalusi squared off- each one defending their own very different process and sensibility. On the subject of body humor, we learned that: Mo plugs up all the holes and John K. opens 'em all up. Sure, but which one floats like a butterfly and which one stings like a bee?

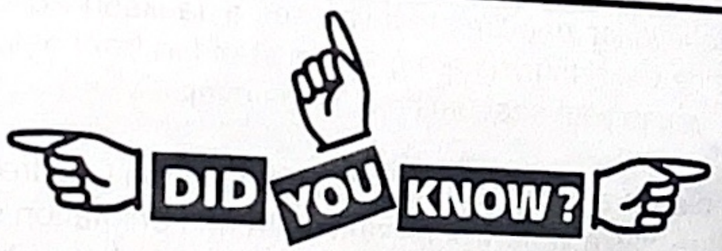
Another panel, on VOs in Animation, featured Stephen Hillenburg and Tom Warburton. A little boy in the audience coaxed Hillenburg into singing the SpongeBob SquarePants theme sans music. Later, in a Meet the Masters event, John K. donned a guitar and yodeled through a tune. At a neat panel on

Letter from the President (continued)

on pitching, all panelists agreed that potential creators should have passion. All the creators mentioned above certainly fit that profile.

In Ottawa, Asifa-East was well represented. Spotted in the crowd were members: Bill Plympton (also honored with a 2nd Prize in the newly created Feature Competition for Mutant Aliens), Ian Chernichaw, Dave Palmer, Hilda Karadsheh, Fran Krause, Dayna Gonzalez, Jason McDonald, Chris Boyce, Linda Simensky, Jay Bastian, Danielle Keenan, Ron Diamond and Alisa Harris.

This next part was hard to write. I believe that most everyone has heard that John Gati passed away in July. We're all very sad about it. He was a big advocate of Asifa-East and the NY Animation community. He cared deeply and held passionate opinions. Whenever John couldn't make a board meeting, he would call to check in with us. I remember how hard John pushed to revive the newsletter in recent years. He really wanted to give our members the best value possible. We hope you join us on October 28th when we spend an evening paying tribute to our friend, John Gati. Films and rare clips will be shown. Special Thanks to Howard Beckerman, the Gati family and SVA for putting all of this together.



**BILL PLYMPTON'S ANICAM **

For the first time in animation history, the public will now be able to watch an entire animated feature being drawn before their eyes.

On Monday, Sept. 16, Bill Plympton will begin drawing his new animated feature, "Hair High", and it will all be done live on the internet. There will be a camera over Bill's shoulder, and from 10 am to 6 pm (E.S.T.) every day, you can watch as he single-handedly draws his new animated extravaganza.

The camera will be viewable at www.hairhigh.com.
For comments, questions or more information on the Anicam please e-mail Bill Plympton at Plymptoons@aol.com)

My Memories of John Gati

by Michael Sporn

John Gati died on July 30, 2002. He was a founding member of ASIFA East and a beloved member of the board. He had been diagnosed with terminal cancer on April 10, 2001. His wife Edith, his sons Paul and William E. survive him.

John was always a fixture at the ASIFA East meetings. I discovered this early when I met him at my first ASIFA meeting back in 1972. I was a fan of animated puppets, and John did 3D animation. He was the only game in town; as a matter of fact, his was one of only two or three studios in the US that did 3D animation. (Things were different back then.) Our first conversation was about Jiri Trnka; up to that point, I'd met no one who had seen any of Trnka's films. I had read about them and borrowed 16mmn prints (there was no video tape back then) from the Donnell library, to watch them over and over and over. John not only knew the films but had met Trnka! ASIFA was home to me! (As it turns out, many of the people there knew Trnka; I'm lucky to have run into the one 3D animator who could talk about him.)

Within a year I worked for John. It was supposed to be for a week, but it grew into three. There was a Care*Free Sugarless gum commercial to do. Both the petite Care*Free gum and the larger Trident gum would strip themselves of their wrappers, jump on a scale and show that they weighed the same. Days and days of prepping the product, days and days of filming. It was fun. On Friday, my last day, as we viewed the spot we learned that we had to do it again. Trident had changed their packaging! Another week of work.

At the end of that week, John asked if I wanted to stay for another week. The esteemed Lou Bunin was about to animate a test commercial. The agency wanted to see if the Lucky Charms elf would work in 3D. Lou Bunin was a big guy to me. He had directed an animated 3D feature version of "Alice In Wonderland" that was released exactly the same time as Disney's "Alice".
I had seen the Bunin "Alice" on TV and had (audio) taped and memorized the soundtrack. What a week! I learned a lot, but it ended up being my only foray into 3D work; there was just too little of it at the time to support me.

John Gati had made it possible for me to work – with a salary – as a 3D animator and assist one of the biggest names in the world at the time. But this was exactly what he did his entire career. He supported ASIFA and ASIFA East religiously: he went to all the board meetings; he went to all the monthly screenings. He was a fixture at the table counting votes for the Festival, and he delighted in the annual Festival – oftentimes winning key prizes, himself. He also went to International Festivals winning prizes there as well.

He spent the last years of his life teaching 3D animation at the School of Visual Arts. Rare to find a school that would dedicate a course to this discipline and even rarer to find a teacher so dedicate. He often called me at my studio to promote the work of individuals in his class.

John was a rare man. A knowledgeable, dedicated, emotional animator and director of a medium that for so long was unpopular. He thrived in the day to day and in the youth that he could help on in their budding careers. He was also a dedicated father of two – artists both – and a loving husband. I'm privileged to have known him and to have worked with him. I miss him as does the New York animation community. His silence is not golden.

*ASIFA East prizes were awarded to John Gati Film Effects In 1969 for EFFECTS, 1973 for FLEISCHMAN'S EGG BEATERS, 1976 for ALLIGATOR FRENCH T-SHIRT and SPEIDEL TWO FACES, 1978 for ROLLED INTO ONE, & in 1986 for ART LOVER'S FANTASY.

Greetings From The South

- by Linda Simensky

VIEW POINT AIEM

I thought I would check in from my outpost in Atlanta and say hello. I took a little column-writing break for the last two years. What did I do with my extra eight hours a year? Probably very little. But I thought now would be a good time to write, since I am energetically procrastinating on another project I am working on. Maureen Furniss, if you are reading this, disregard that last line. I am hard at work.

I guess the most interesting thing I've done lately was be on the jury at Zagreb back in June. I had never been to that festival, although I had always wanted to go. I had been searching for a new festival to attend. I have found Annecy to be a bit overwhelming, and while I think it can be fun, I realize that sitting around complaining about the film selection has started losing its appeal. If I am going to travel overseas and invest a week in film watching, I think I'd like to enjoy the films. I've also been searching for festivals that are "like the old days," (similar to the way one might go to Greenwich Village searching for the beatnik vibe.) But with certain festivals, I have found that they have the feel of being timeless or at least untouched by industry. Zagreb seems like one of those festivals. It has a certain sense of history, which was especially apparent this past year, as the festival celebrated its 30th year in existence. The walls outside the auditorium at the festival were filled with photos, letters, and posters from the early 1970s on, and well-known animators had sent cards celebrating the 30th anniversary.

The festival itself was great, with a number of amazing films, and some very interesting retrospectives, including a great Paul Dreissen retrospective. There was a screening of a documentary about the history of Japanese animation, made in Japan in the early 1970s. I picked up a new book on Dreissen that was published in Canada and the Netherlands, and read it on the trip home. I tend to leave festivals all excited about independent film, and I promise myself that I will pull out all my tapes and watch one film a night. Then I return to work, where the storyboards are stacked two feet high, and (insert sfx of needle scratching to a halt against record,) the joy of film watching ends, and reality kicks back in. That's why I am excited to be going to Ottawa again this year. With the exception of two years in the mid-to-late-90s, where the industry had seemingly taken over, the festival always comes through with good films and a good survey of what's out there to be seen. I am looking forward to the Harry Smith retrospective this year.

The industry remains in its usual state of flux. Having lived through several cycles in the industry myself, I do know that everything is cyclical and that if you can wait it out, some studio will end up with a bunch of shows, have to hire a floor full of people, and everything will be back to normal. In fact, with the number of new studios opening in New York recently, if anything, things seems a little more positive than they have in the past year.

As for me, I should mention that this October marks my seven-year anniversary at Cartoon Network. A baby born the day I moved to Atlanta would have started second grade this month. Sobering, yes? On the other hand, I am a much better driver than I was seven years ago, if you consider that a good thing. And on that happy note, I will sign off and go to bed, because that's the kind of fun stuff we do here in Atlanta.

Animazing Gallery

Invites you to our

HALLOWEEN PARTY

Saturday, October 26, from 2-6pm

Featuring Animation Art

From

Rankin Bass's THE MAD MONSTER PARTY

*Come Meet Legendary Animation Artist

DON DUGA

The Event will be held at our SOHO Gallery, located at 461 Broome St. (Between Mercer and Greene)

To RSVP, or for more information, please contact DAVID SCHEVE at David@animazing.com (212)226.7374

BOOK REVIEW

David Ehrlich: Citizen of the World.

A review of Olivier Cotte's book.

-by Richard Gorey.

I've always valued those rare moments in my creative life when I'm exposed to a whole new way of thinking and seeing. I love these little twinges: those experiences when you feel as if the top of your head has been blown off, and all kinds of new thought and information get in. I had one of these epiphanies when I read Olivier Cotte's book David Ehrlich, Citizen of the World, but I suspect David Ehrlich's life has been a continuous stream of such moments.

I must confess, I'd never heard of David Ehrlich before the opportunity to review the book came up. The artist himself may suggest my connection to his work was meant t be- that there are no such things as accidents or coincidences. Ehrlich, I learned, has had an eclectic and extensive artistic and spiritual education. "I'm very comfortable wi the Chinese multi-perspective," he tells his biographer, Cotte. "Despite my eternal wis to have been born Chinese, I wasn't (yet)." This explains the almost transcendental approach to movement, color, and mostly transition in the artist's work.

I'm sure some of my fellow ASIFA members are more familiar with Ehrlich's films than I: his rhythmic, intuitive, colorful and sensuous works that represent a very unique approach to the art of animation. These films are not "cartoons" in the usual sense: they're highly-individual, non-narrative, graphically dense visual experiences. Ehrlich animations aren't really concerned with recreating recognizable figures and situations but with universal attitudes and moods, and the more subtle aspects of the constantly changing natural world. Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of his films is their loose, unconventional structure. I'm not even sure "structure" is the right word, actually, because, according to Cotte: "he does not perceive the surrounding world as a succession of events, but rather as a continuity. His films reflect this point of view." Ehrlich's films begin and end, but their starts and finishes seem arbitrary: it's storytelling, certainly, but not in the narrative sense.

Of his biographical study of David Ehrlich's films, Cotte says that the rule is "instability because, like the work of its subject, "nothing is stationary or immobile." Then the author goes on to illustrate this point, by inviting the reader into the very organic, unpredictable, and fluidly artistic personal life of Ehrlich himself. As a result, the book has a balance between the subject and his oeuvre that's intriguing, and cleverly appropriate.

In fact, the book reminded me very much of the famous "Truffaut/Hitchcock" piece f many reasons. Like the Truffaut book, Citizen of the World unfolds as a series of interviews. Cotte, like Truffaut, is French, and there is an ethnic sensibility to the writing- and a depth of aesthetic appreciation of Ehrlich's work- that I don't think one would find in an American book. Thirdly, the book is more concerned with the technique, philosophy, and subtext of the artist's work than with gossip, history, and anecdotes. As such, it's an incredibly dense exploration of the impetus, mathematics, and underlying motivation for the creative process of a man whose influences range from classical painting and sculpture to the subtle mysteries of the I-ching. Like its subject, the book is complex: it requires attention and focus. This isn't a coffee-table volume for the casual film fan: it's a serious- and seriously intricate- exploration of a man's life and work.

Ehrlich's films speak to a life lived in the pursuit of an understanding of the world around him- not merely the pursuit of film knowledge. The information and discussions that make up the bulk of the book are radically removed from the usual animation dialogue. Most animator I know- when they discuss the art form- refer to... well, other animated films. Our point of reference is the narrative work created by artists who convey humor and drama through character and plot. Speaking from my own experience, my education in animation has been confined mostly to getting the anatomy of a character right, and in learning how to create emotion and connection through situation and character interaction. In other words, to make films, I've studied other films, and my work reflects this. Nothing wrong with that.

But Ehrlich's approach encourages his audience to think in completely different terms: "My expressing an idea in a work is quite different from the construction of a narrative which in the traditional Aristotelian definition, must have a beginning, middle and end with a kind of climax and resolution of tension," Ehrlich says. "My films may 'end' after four or five minutes, but not through these means". To many animators brought up emulating the Disney and Warner's styles, this may seem heretical and controversial. The book makes mention of the resistance to Ehrlich's style and format by those in the industry and outside of it. There is- we all know- an established expectation of what a "cartoon" is to most of the movie-going public. Films like Fritz the Cat and Yellow Submarine challenged this perception, but Ehrlich's work pushes this definition even further past the accepted boundaries. And as we know, people are less comfortable outside their boundaries. Experiencing Ehrlich's work for the first time requires an open mind for people who have always thought of cartoons as films for children.

This unconventional approach makes more sense when one considers Ehrlich's experiences- both in his younger studies in the Orient and India, and his relationship to the world around him near his home. "I don't think I'm particularly religious," he says, "but living and working in the Vermont mountains brings me very close to nature, to the transformations and movements of life and death, and working on my films somehow enables me to be a part of all that."

I can't recall ever hearing an animator express their work- and their relationship to animation- in quite the same way. Most animators I know of will say that the things that inspired them were the films they saw as a child, usually the Disney works. Ehrlich has entered the art form from an entirely different perspective, and as a result his work hardly resembles the kind of films many animators aspire to emulate. His "Robot" series, for instance, explores textures and perspective in a way that breaks the rules even as it adheres to mathematical principles. His "Dissipative Dialogues" unfolds like a series of events and catalysts in a romantic relationship, and there is tremendous emotion in this piece, but no attempt to manipulate the audience into feeling the emotion. Ehrlich's "Dryads" is a very erotic exploration of female sensuality and sexuality. It has a compelling symmetry, and displays a fascination with the female form (which characterizes much of the artist's work) but there is an underlying feeling of the mysticism inherent in sexuality that keeps the piece from seeming familiar, or lascivious.

At one point in Cotte's book, animator Paul Driessen related a story in which he was present during an unreceptive screening of Ehrlich's early work. "David confessed he was quite nervous because he thought the Annecy audience wouldn't take kindly to experimental animation, the kind of films he was good at. He was right...although not everybody might be excited about experimental animation, festivals really need these films to make the world aware of the wide variety of animation and in order to push the borders of the genre."

This anecdote, I believe, is at the heart of the book's creation, and at the heart of its appeal for animators, both traditional and experimental. In it, I read about terms and approaches I'd never heard of before. These included the concept of a film in which the camera's point of view is arbitrary, (something radical to my sensibilities) the idea of film without "cuts" in the traditional sense, an exploration of the color philosophy of Vasarely and the Bauhaus studies (which examined how our perception of color changes depending upon its juxtaposition with other colors).

Through the course of his discussions with writer Cotte, Ehrlich explores the use of music and its influence on his films: rather than merely a source of beats and timing, music serves a more spiritual purpose in his work. Instead of being an element of support in his films, it is often the reason for his films.

The book's most fascinating passages for me were the intense, exhaustive explorations of the use, expression, and value of color in animation. Not color in the established sense – as an element of style and production value, but color from an almost instinctive perspective. The author spends much time on the breakdown of the 12-point color system Ehrlich employs in his pencil films. There is a comparison between these lushly rendered pieces and the significant absence of color that characterizes Ehrlich's Chinese calligraphic films.

There's also an intriguing exploration of the color harmonies in elaborate works like Dissipative Fantasies and A Child's Dream. Like the Disney artists, Ehrlich uses color for psychological effect, but he is also more concerned with the application and juxtaposition of color as well. Like the films of Oscar Fischinger (whom Ehrlich admires) David's work showcases color- often to the exclusion of plot and characterization. As a result, a fuller impact of color can be exploited and examined. Color isn't merely an element of the experience: it is the experience. This was heady stuff, for someone like myself, who grew up on Bugs Bunny.

Cotte's reverent and exhaustive appraisal of Ehrlich's work serves as a primer for those who may not have been previously exposed to this novel approach to animated filmmaking. Throughout the book, I was writing down names and books and studies mentioned that I'd never heard of. Most of the learning I've done about animation has come from the books on Hollywood Cartoons. Ehrlich's non-traditional education and background have enabled him to experience animation in a very different way, and I wonder if the correct venue for viewing his films shouldn't be something more unique as well. Seen in conjunction with typical animated fare, his work is a revelation, and to some people, a distraction. I wonder if someday, someone will mount an actual gallery showing of Ehrlich's films. I'd like to see them presented within frames (the use of a frame, or window, is a recurring motif in the artist's work) playing on a continuous loop in an installation dedicated solely to them. Like museum pieces, I suspect Ehrlich's films are meant to be experienced at one's leisure, not sandwiched between other, dissimilar works. Because they unfold organically, they might be seen to better advantage when run continuously. Maybe such a non-traditional approach demands a non-traditional screening process. On the other hand, perhaps the artist's work makes the strongest impression when seen in counterpoint to conventional cartoons. I wonder how other animators feel.

Ehrlich's contributions to animation are not limited to his short films. As a teacher and therapist, he's given something more to the field. I confess to being particularly fond of the films he created with children, in workshops he organized in the eighties and nineties. These little gems charmed my socks off, and I wondered at the method behind his approach. In the book, Ehrlich explains: "I usually start with a simple drawing everyone can do without embarrassment: a circle or a square. Little by little, through a semi-transparent pad of paper, the children move the shape, to the side, th

rwards, (getting bigger and bigger) then morphing. By this point, many children are o longer paying attention to me, confidently going off in their own direction. "

hese films are wonderful examples of the intuitive power of animation. I loved that ey all started from the same place, then went off into very different directions, ctated by the whims of their creators. There's a sense of universality and individuality alance) within these works that's remarkable. In a way they represent the process of rth and life: starting from something formless, then literally transforming before our es into something unique and recognizable, in much the way a young child grows. ey are stunningly simple representations of the process of development and the rth of personality. In a way, they remind one of Ehrlich's own approach, which ctates an organic feel to the progression of scenes and shapes. "What is your point view of this work [with children]?" Cotte asks the artist, and Ehrlich responds, "It's en my 'finest hour.'"

Along the way, the author references the use of the window as a motif in Ehrlich's rk. To me, this is a key element in the way the films are presented and executed: the e of a framing device is perhaps the only way in which Ehrlich's work can be nsidered "traditional", since it implies a point of view. This was- for someone ounded in conventional filmmaking- an essential component of my connection with e films. The window establishes Ehrlich's role as an observer. To my way of thinking, is role- and Ehrlich's subjective representation of what he's observed- are his eatest contribution to the art form. The book references Ehrlich's experiences with imal carcasses deteriorating along the roads in the country where he lives: these atural decompositions- the constant cycle of birth and death, and the transitional ature of the earth around the artist- seem to have affected his work profoundly. hrlich tells Cotte: "In the beginning [of my spiritual studies] at a more elementary and perficial level, I found a gentle peace and understanding of life and death and their ntinuum that seemed right to me. ..I kept for myself that first elementary feeling of e continuum of life and death, something I had not satisfactorily found for myself in her Christianity or Judaism."

This blending of spirituality and art- of life and life's work- is what I found most mpelling in Ehrlich. Cotte evidently did as well. I doubt anyone without an cyclopedic knowledge of Chinese philosophy- and the art techniques of Kandinsky, ee, O'keefe, and the disciplines of Chinese Calligraphy- could have attempted to derstand or explain Ehrlich's work as effectively. I doubt Ehrlich could have had as aningful interaction with someone not as well-versed in color theory and the athematical principles inherent in his very complex films as Cotte obviously was. d yet, despite the book's academic tone, there are moments which give a glimpse o the joy and simplicity of Ehrlich's process. I was relieved- after pages of cussions which went miles over my head- when Ehrlich said at one point: ometimes I begin a film by just putting pen on paper and suddenly find a film olving," and: "I love playing with color. I have fun with it, sometimes as much fun as I d playing with Crayola crayons as a child." These statements were a comfort to me: I s wondering when they would get to the "fun" part of animation. To me, it's an sential ingredient in the process of animation. I get the feeling Ehrlich agrees. s childlike nature is curiously at odds with the intellectual approach to the hniques, mathematics, and structure in Ehrlich's work. It was a schism I thought uld remain unresolved, but then at one point, the author asks the artist if he has any ldren of his own, and Ehrlich says; " No. I was a poor artist with no prospects for ancial stability and I didn't think we could manage." The book's later passages, wever, suggest Ehrlich has many "children"- in that he has functioned as a teacher d an inspiration for young artists and students of animation over the years. I think his

work affects his audience on a very childlike level, despite the maturity and complexity behind it. There's something instinctual and almost primal in a viewing of David's films like moods, the come and go. Like emotions, they rise and fall. Like life, they are complex and sometimes obtuse. It's an approach I was unprepared for, but that I found refreshing and enlightening. The feeling I got from the experience of David's work was similar, I believe, to the experience David had when he first encountered the unfamiliar philosophies and teachings that eventually influenced his style.

I suspect his films are meant to be a sharing of that knowledge and experience in a very personal way. Ehrlich's films are the synthesis of his life's education into something colorful, evocative, beautiful, and mysterious. Like the artistic and cultural milestones the artist has lived, his films are not easily grasped and appreciated at first glance. It may not be fair to assess the quality- and the intent- of Ehrlich's films when they're seen between humorous short subjects.

As a "citizen of the world" (I loved that title) David Ehrlich has managed to redefine an existing art form to suit his own experiences and sensibilities. As a teacher, he seems to have been able to convey this enthusiasm to others in a way that is as joyful as it has been instructional. As someone who obviously loves animation, Ehrlich has an ability to speak about the art form in a way that helps animators re-think their own relationship with the medium and its tools.

For me, reading the book several times through was the jolt I needed to shake up my expectations of the process and purpose of animation. As a companion piece to the films themselves, the book is a helpful guide into the mind of an eclectically educated man who's tried to expand the consciousness of animated films to include the influences of not only classical painting and sculpture but of Eastern Philosophy and meditative disciplines. What a wonderful tribute the book is to the artist's life and work. To anyone interested in Ehrlich's films- or to anyone who has ever wanted to create a film from this non-traditional perspective- I'd recommend giving the Cotte's book more than a casual glance.

*DAVID EHRLICH: CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, a book by Olivier Cotte, on David's life and international animation work, was published in June in English and French by Dreamland Editeur in Paris. Distributed in the U.S. by the University Press of New England, the book is available at http://www.upne.com.

MoCCA Animation Event

MoCCA's (Museum of Comic & Cartoon Art) First Anniversary Celebration, hosted by Stretch Films. The event will be animation based and we would like to invite all your members. Check out the website for more details and to see the special Jam Drawing for the event.

http://www.moccany.org/events-anniversary.html

212 254 3511

At:

Stretch Films

6 West 18th street. 11th fl. NY, NY 10011

November 15th

8pm - 12am.

ZAGREB ANIMAFEST 2002: A PLACE TO GO TO

by Biljana Labovic

After years of war, political tension, and confusion in my head, I was ready to set my foot in Zagreb again. Coming from the other side of the line, I almost didn't know what to expect. My memories of Croatia go back to the 1980's when Yugoslavia was one big happy family and we used to take summer vacations along the Adriatic coast. I remember my high school trip to Zagreb back in 1989, what only two years later I thought might have been my last visit there. Everything changed.

But thirteen years later, I found myself in the Croatian capital again. I was excited to be back and moreover, go to Animafest, the famous Zagreb Animation Festival for the first time. The place that produced such amazing films in the past, from the first non-American cartoon to receive an Oscar - Surogat (also known as Ersatz or Substitute in English), to one of my most favorite films - melancholic and sensual Satiemania, cartoon series like Professor Balthazar that made my childhood, Zagreb stood for Animation Mecca in my dictionary. A place to go to. At times when I couldn't even think of crossing the border to the other side, I remember watching the daily festival reports in Serbia, receiving scrambled and poor Croatian TV signal, just to see what's going on out there in the world of animation. When I briefly met Chuck Jones in New York in 1997, he told me a little anecdote how Festival people were so welcoming and warm to him when he went to Zagreb in 1988, they hugged him and started kissing him as soon as he got out of the plane. He said he didn't understand why, since they never met him before. I wondered if that was true. Well, they might not hug you right away if you're not Chuck Jones, but surely they will after they first meet you. As soon as I dropped off my bag in the near-by hotel, I rushed to the Festival Theatre Lisinski, and sat at the theater café. I briefly exchanged a few words with the waiter about our inevitable Balkan destinies. "Welcome back to Zagreb" he said, "and by the way, the coffee's on me". Right there I knew I was going to love it in Zagreb!

In its 15th edition, Animafest was celebrating the big 30th anniversary this year. Due to the war in the Balkans throughout the 90's and Annecy Festival going annually a few years ago (Annecy and Zagreb Festivals used to alternate years), Zagreb has been struggling with its decades-long reputation, and finally this year, on its big birthday was able to make a true comeback. For a week, the audience had a chance to see some of the finest contemporary animation shorts, ranging from independent to commercial. The programs were packed with quality films, but the quantity didn't seem overwhelming. There was still plenty of time for talks, drinks and friendly acquaintances. Once again, no one could resist the beautiful and touching Father and Daughter - Michael Dudok de Wit took the Grand Prix for his timeless and wonderful film. The Best Debut Film was awarded to Niel Goodridge from Australia for a very comic, yet serious and emotional film, Pa, about a boy who never met his grandfather and is wondering if he would have liked him. Award for the Best student film went to Stepan Birjukov for Neighbors, a story about inhabitants of a communal apartment in Moscow in 1930's. The audience loved and awarded Mikhail Aldashin's Bookashky and Down to the Bone, a film by René Castillo.

Life Achievement Award went to the man who has been honored many awards and retrospectives this year at various festivals – Paul Driessen. With a film retrospective, new book - Paul Driessen: Images and Reflections, exhibition in the Lisinski hall

(organized by Holland Animation Film Festival and shown in Annecy two weeks earlier) The Boy Who Saw the Iceberg in competition, and Elbowing, which was included in a special program called Best of the Best, the Dutch-Canadian animator was the ultimate star of Zagreb 2002. Best of the Best, a poll which the Zagreb festival took for years at other festivals asking audience to vote for their all-time favorite films, included 10 more masterpieces: Allegro Non Troppo by Bruno Bozzetto, Cow by Alexander Petrov, Creature Comforts by Nick Park, Diary by Nedeljko Dragi_, Girl's night Out by Joanna Quinn, The man who planted Trees by Frederic Back, Satiemania by Zdenko Ga_parovi_, Street of Crocodiles by the Quay Brothers, The Street by Caroline Leaf and the winner of the Best of the Best poll, Tale of Tales by Yuri Norstein. Many filmmakers came to Zagreb to receive their awards. Canadian Films beyond the Boar a show compiled by Chris Robinson, director of the Ottawa Animation Festival, includ films that were produced outside the National Film Board of Canada: presented were and retrospectives included Aardman presents, Films by Piotr Dumala, Films by Victo Bergdahl, The History of Japanese Animation, Films from Bosnia & Herzegovina. A program called Northern Lights - retrospective of Norwegian animation presented by Gunnar Strom, included some of the finest films produced in this northern country: a beautiful time-lapse piece A year Along the Abandoned Road, My Mother Ironed the King's Shirts and many others. Croatian Tales of Long Ago, an international internet project by Helena Bulaja, included eight fairytales by the Croatian writer for children, Ivana Brli_-Mazurani_. The project was presented to eight animators around the wor and they started collaborating on a project via internet, using Flash animation. You c watch it at www.bulaja.com/FAIRYTALES/. The Zagreb audience also had a chance see three very different feature films: Metropolis, Peter Pan: Return to Neverland, an Waking Life. Like many other international festivals, Animafest also paid tribute to tho whom the animation world lost between two festivals, with a special program In Memoriam. Presented were our beloved Faith Hubley with Step by Step, Chuck Jone Jan Lenica, Alison De Vere, Viatscheslav Khotenotchkin and Yves Rifaux. The Festiv also paid tribute to the 90th birth anniversary of John Hallas, who passed away in 19

Our local ASIFA-East participation/attendance in Animafest 2002 was quite impressive. Linda Simensky was a judge in the Official Jury, John R. Dilworth made personal appearance with this year's ASIFA-East winner, Mousochist, in competition. Last year's ASIFA-East winner, Eat, by Bill Plympton was also shown in the competition, as well as Maciek Albrecht's Christmas Song. Paul & Sandra Fierlinger Still Life With Animated Dogs received a special distinction award for the spontaneit the animation and acutely observed relationship between the filmmaker and his dog and a few more animations from their Drawn from Life series were shown in competition - American in Paris, Woman With Cello, A Special Gift. Mona Mon Amou by Michael Sporn and Natasha by Signe Baumane were shown in the Animania Program. Other representatives of our ASIFA chapter who attended the Festival onl enjoy the films, were Elanna Allen and myself.

The wonderful Zagreb audience lived an animation dream for a week. A versatile r of not only foreign guests, filmmakers, students, but also regular Zegrebians - fans animation who diligently visited screenings every night, makes it a very special crow that loves and celebrates animation. The big Lisinski Theatre might have not been f every night, but the atmosphere inside was more than fulfilling. With no VIP events, class and hierarchy, this place is wonderful to meet everyone - filmmakers, fans, cri journalists, festival workers, or even a Swedish politician in disguise. If you can imag discussing Waking Life with Bob Godfrey at 2 AM. on the way to the hotel, having Russian cheese and vodka with Yuri Norstein singing to the balalaika at the picnic, "fighting" with David Ehrlich to use a computer for internet, talking about the hot, ho Zagreb weather with Caroline Leaf while waiting for the next film to start...or, just

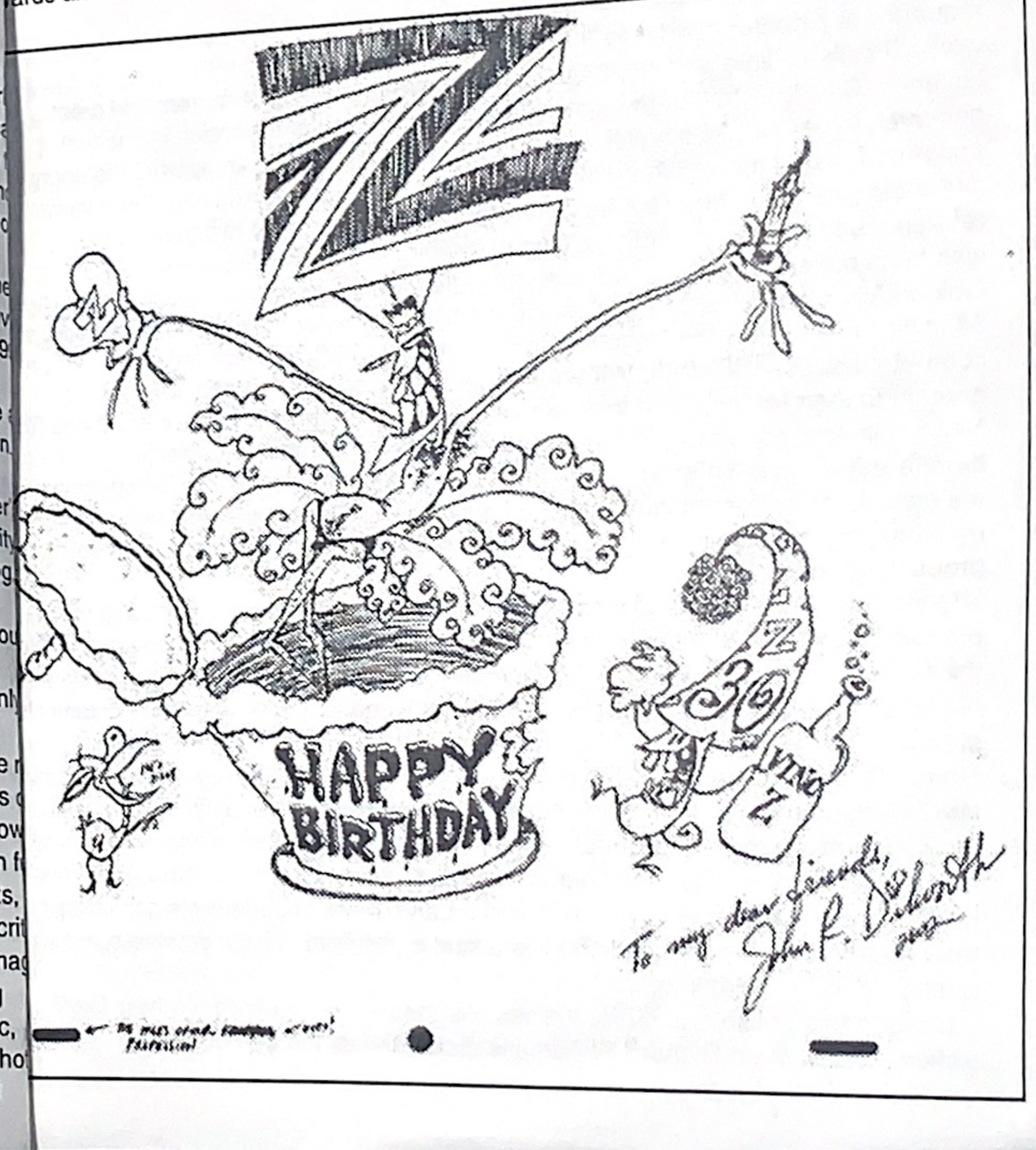
waiting for the dawn in front of the Esplanade hotel with dozens of vivacious animators - hat's what Zagreb's like!

Mark June 2004 on your calendar. While in Zagreb, try some of the many local pecialties - meat stews, poultry with "mlinci" noodles (pronounced "mleentzee"), heese pastry rolls called "_trukli" (pronounced "shrtooklee") or delicious strudles and akes. And treat yourself with a few more days after the Festival to explore the beautiful lands and the Adriatic coast. It'll be worth your time and money. And of course, don't rget to see a few films while you're there, too.

e you in Zagreb 2004!

r more info on the Zagreb Animation Festival, go to www.animafest.hr

ljana Labovic comes from Yugoslavia, where she made one animated film before she oved to New York in 1997, as a recipient of UNICEF scholarship for animation to dy at the School of Visual Arts. She has been working on projects with UNICEF, nily & Faith Hubley and Bill Plympton. Her latest film "Eye Spy" brought her several vards and she's currently working on a new short.



Valley of the Dolls:The making of Raggedy Ann and Andy

by Rich Gorey

Reality is subjective, and perception is reality. Each of us may have definite ideas o what constitutes a great film- or what makes a bad one. The criteria for success in a cartoon film are mercurial, but most would agree fine animation, an entertaining premise, strong voice characterizations, and lush color photography would certainly enough to result in a certifiable hit. Bobbs-Merrill's The Adventures of Raggedy Ann and Andy has all of these things, and then some- yet somehow, the finished film has left a small impression on the animation industry and on movie fans. Its reputation- among moviegoers and critics - is a sorry one. If it's mentioned at all in film studies, Raggedy Ann is usually cited as an example of what not to do in an animated featur length cartoon.

But why? Though the film was begun with such high hopes, it ended in disappointment- no more so than for the team of talented artists and animators who assembled to created it. How does something like this happen? How is it possible th an animated adventure directed by the great Richard Williams, with a score by famo composer Joe Raposo- could fail to find an audience?

The answer- like the film itself- is complicated. It's easy, of course, to look back o a quarter of a century and play "Monday morning quarterback" with someone else's work. It's also a little unfair to try to judge an already-finished film from that great distance. Still, the story of the making (and the undoing) of the movie is one that deserves to be told. As a writer and animator, I was curious to know what the energ and mood was like on such an extensive project- both before and after the reviews came out. I was intrigued by the film's reputation, and startled to find so few references to it in recent writings. One of the rare mentions I discovered of the mov was in an old essay by animator George Griffin, who, speaking for many, said: "The Golden Age Cartoon is dead. As an independent animator I deplore the spectacle o $4 million production like Raggedy Ann and Andy (1977), in which fine animators, a competent director (Richard Williams), and composer (Joe Raposo) could not get c enough to their material and their personal sense of fantasy to make a satisfying fi Nearly every scene and musical number is designed for aesthetic overkill, and thou there are flashes of individual animator's genius, the film as a whole is impoverishe a shocking lack of personal vision. Raggedy Ann and Andy operates as a merchandising gimmick on the part of an anonymous media concern: a presold product, not a work of art."

Ouch. Well, Griffin at least was correct in his assessment of the film as "a presol product", but then- so were almost all of the Disney films: this shouldn't have precl the movie's reputation as art. And it certainly shouldn't have kept Raggedy Ann an Andy from becoming a financial success. But something else in Griffin's comment stands out as well. He says, "there are flashes of individual animator's genius." Here, I believe, is the key to the film's worth and appeal for animators and student film. Raggedy Ann and Andy is an almost classic example of a film whose parts a up to something more wonderful than the whole. That it failed to engage audience an emotional level caused people to dismiss its impressive technical merits. What' missing from the finished piece is cohesion and, more importantly, a good story, bu from time to time, the movie achieves a kind of inspired, lunatic greatness, and it's quality I'd like to speak to.

Despite this polish and surface gloss, Raggedy Ann and Andy has been largely vilified. Today, even Richard Williams is dismissive of the movie: in a

ecent "Master Class" at which he officiated, he barely mentioned Raggedy Ann, except to remark that John Canemaker's book on the production "was better than the ovie itself." It's ironic that of all the art created for the movie, the most conspicuous chievement surrounding the production was Canemaker's book. Williams' recent eticence to discuss the film (and his other ill-fated feature The Cobbler and the Thief) a marked contrast to his boundless enthusiasm for those projects, while they were in evelopment. Had they succeeded, Williams' career might have taken on a momentum at could have rivaled Disney's prominence in the field. Raggedy Ann and Andy presented the brass ring Williams didn't grab until he directed the animation for Who amed Roger Rabbit? years later.

The creation of a feature length animated film is an overwhelming prospect -even to ose skilled at the craft of animation. There are of course many success stories, ostly Disney films) but there are more often disappointments. That Raggedy Ann d Andy disappeared quickly from theaters is sad- but within the film, there are oments of depth, maturity, style, and quality that disappeared along with everything se. This is even sadder. Canemaker's book discusses in detail the attitudes, talent, d artistry behind the making of the movie. What I'd like to address is how those sitive qualities were compromised, and how the finished film failed to live up to the forts of the talented artists involved. My intention is not to cast blame or to tear the rk down- just to unravel the series of decisions and restrictions that kept these ople from delivering something as wonderful as the film they had in their heads. Like other animators, I admire the craftsmanship and polish inherent in Raggedy Ann d Andy. Technically, it's undeniably impressive. It's possible that the film's strange mosphere of surreal nightmare is what makes it unique: there are some bleak, rrifying, and truly disturbing images in the film. For all the beauty in Raggedy Ann, ere are other moments that are (intentionally, I believe) hideously ugly. The movie's sual wonders are even more impressive when one considers it was created before e advent of computer animation, and that it was financed and produced by an dependent concern. The Panavision photography in Raggedy Ann gives it a lavish, ulent feel that serves the story- even when the story itself lets the audience down. e wonders what the movie might have been like had it been the product of a major dio like Disney, but this speculation is a trap. Considering the period in which it was de, this might not have made any real difference: during the mid-seventies, the ney studios were faltering as well, with some technically stylish, but static and destrian features that are little remembered today. It's important to remember that n Disney has had their misfires.

Whatever else it is- or isn't- Raggedy Ann and Andy is a dizzying exercise in escreen camerawork, color, and full animation. The problem, unfortunately, is that his considerable skill and intricacy has been hung around a story that never olves the audience emotionally and a score that is- by any standards- poor. Could film have overcome these structural flaws? Likely, no, but on Raggedy Ann, these ilities were the tip of a very confusing iceberg. How, you may ask, did these serious blems go unresolved?

ome of the answers have been detailed in John Canemaker's vivid, thorough, and omatic document The Animated Raggedy Ann and Andy. To anyone interested in story of the film before its release, this book is a treasure trove of information, rviews, and commentary. The book covers nearly every aspect of pre-production, mation, direction, and photography. But Canemaker's status as invited guest on the may have precluded him from offering more critical opinions of the film and its rtcomings. It's unlikely Canemaker had the freedom to write a more objective essment of the film's assets and liabilities. As a result, the book concerns itself

more with the style and theory of animation, and it offers a worthwhile glimpse into the
minds of some of the world's topmost animation artists. The book ends, however, on a
fascinatingly suspenseful note: It is shortly before the film's premiere. Williams has jus
been demoted, the film's deadline is in question. A new director has been assigned to
rescue the project, and the tension is palpable. The release date is in question.I
wanted to know more. For starters, of course, there's tons of information between the
lines of Canemaker's book. In the past few weeks, I've spoken with some of the artist
involved in the making of the movie, and a few who were close by when it all
happened. They were all gracious, accessible, helpful, and surprisingly candid in the
opinions of the finished film and the rather torturous process of creating it. The story
Raggedy Ann and Andy is- to my way of thinking- a crash-course in Guerilla
filmmaking, and, to those interested in making a feature, a useful peek into the
Labyrinthine process. If the world is a sorry schoolroom, then Raggedy Ann and And
was like three years at Harvard for those who struggled to create it. It's a cautionary
tale for anyone considering a career in the field, but like all scary stories, it does hav
something of a happy ending.

The genesis of the controversy surrounding the movie lies in the decision to alter t
original concept for its presentation. Raggedy Ann was originally conceived as a live
action theatrical production. Composer and lyricist Joe Raposo had met theatrical
producers Lester Osterman and Richard Horner at a Friars Club Roast and it was
decided shortly thereafter to create a Broadway musical revue with live actors in the
roles of Annie and her brother, Andy. The rights to the characters were easily
accessible, and it was felt that the recognition factor accorded the dolls would bode
well for the success of the venture.

When it was suggested (Most likely by Raposo, though opinions differ) that the st
be told through animation, the producers- having little experience with cartoons,
shopped the idea around in New York, where they were located. Might things have
been different if the producers looked in California, first? Maybe: the animation indu
in America was centered in southern California: in New York, there was a wealth of
talent, but no feature studios.

Howard Beckerman recalls the producers approached Joe Oriolo, an independer
New York animator, early on. Supplied with a screenplay written by producer
Osterman's daughter, writer Pat Thackeray, Oriolo balked. He felt the treatment wa
weak, but was warned not to alter it. Daunted, but interested in tackling the extens
project, Oriolo collaborated with Preston Blair (ex-Disney artist) and the husband a
wife team of Martin and Alice Provinson on a storyboard for the film. Still, the
Thackeray script troubled them. They decided (perhaps unwisely, in retrospect) tha
some things would have to be changed if the film was to succeed. This revised boa
was presented to the producers (and Raposo) early on. According to the version of
meeting in Canemaker book, Raposo was sarcastically disdainful of the treatment,
by his own admission barked at Blair, Oriolo, and the others: "Get me a reservation
[Richard Williams in] London. I won't work with you people. I will not be involved w
you. Goodbye."

If one believes Raposo's version, it sounds as if Oriolo's team had seriously
compromised something that was already polished, workable, and successful. In t
light, Raposo's departure seems like the act of a dedicated artist committed to the
quality and the craftsmanship of the final film. But in hindsight, it seems more likely
Raposo was objecting to- and reacting to- the fact that his score had been
compromised in the treatment, and that the team had taken liberties with his perso
reworked screenplay. "There was one horrendous sequence I'm still smarting from
Raposo told Canemaker. "They'd thrown out 'Blue' the camel's song,

nd substituted a song for the Cookie Giant!'"

Most people who were involved in the film will say now that they had tremendous
eservations about both the quality- and the proliferation- of Raposo's songs for the film
riginally there were twenty-six of them). Yet the composer was never receptive to
uggestion that his work be altered- even when this might have meant a stronger film.
here's no doubt of Raposo's talent, but by all accounts, on Raggedy Ann he was
receptive to alterations or criticism regarding the work he'd created.In defense of
aposo, I'll take the high road: he'd been invited by the producers to score what they
t was a Broadway styled production. It's the form he and producers Osterman and
rner understood best. From the beginning, Raposo was a fan of Williams work, and
had probably already decided to engage Williams by the time the Oriolo team had
esented their boards. Raposo was frank in admitting he thought Williams was "a
nius- and I'm a genius. Now, that and fifty cents will get you on the IRT." Perhaps as
eative types, Williams and Raposo were a good match. Each was driven, egotistical,
d enormously talented. Both were capable of temper and arrogance, and both had
eady succeeded to the top of their fields: Williams with an Oscar and Raposo with
Emmy. One gets the feeling that Raposo felt "among his own" with the similarly-
ted Williams.At one point, Shamus Culhane, also located in New York, pitched
mself to the producers as director, but this talented animator of famous TV spots had
reputation for being difficult that may have scared the producers off. Following
aposo's lead, Osterman and Horner went with Williams, for several reasons:
the time of Raggedy Ann's inception, Williams' evocative animated version of A
hristmas Carol had won an Academy Award, and his London Studio had received
vorable press- and some enviable commissions- for short films and commercials as a
sult. He had engineered the now-classic credits to the Pink Panther film, among
any others, and there had been a BBC documentary about his work and his studi
s profile was high, and his talent was obvious. At first glance, Williams was the
imator of the moment; the golden boy who could deliver a feature that could match
e quality of the polished Disney classics. But there was more to the picture: Williams'
ubled feature The Thief and the Cobbler had been too long in pre-production- and
er years of animation, precious little of it was ready for final printing. By Williams'
n admission, his work and obsessive focus on Thief had resulted in a backlog on the
mmercial product that was his studio's bread and butter. Deadlines were missed:
dgets were sometimes compromised as well. In hindsight, Williams greatest success
s in creating shorter films: animated title sequences and commercial products. With
troubles surrounding his Arabian Nights project, he had yet to successfully
nage the production of a feature length production on his own.
roducing the ninety minutes required of a feature film in New York, while running a
tling studio of his own in London was a challenge far too great for Williams to
nage. This grueling schedule took its toll early on. Howard Beckerman, who had
dio space in the building at 18 West 45th street where Raggedy Ann was animated,
s; "I ran into Williams several times during that period. He always seemed to be
ning to catch another plane. He was splitting his time between New York, a
ifornia studio [which had been set up late into the game} and his own studio in
don. I don't know how he did it! I don't see how anyone could do it!"

next month's issue: as the film goes over-budget and tension mounts,
ividual animators put their hearts and their talent into the film,
king around the clock to finish Raggedy Ann for a projected Christmas
ase date.

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Sundance Animation Program
Announcement

The 2003 Sundance Film Festival will mark the first year of the Sundance Animation Program. Although Sundance has always had top quality animation from American and International independent filmmakers, the purpose of this program is to spread recognition and appreciation for animation as a cinematic art form equal in quality and creativity to live action cinema.

For information on submission guidelines please check online at: http://www.sundance.org.

For further information please contact the Animation Programming Consultant, Gary Scheppke at: questionablefilm@hotmail.com.

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